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## Acknowledging Settler Responsibility

Alex Forsyth

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## **ACKNOWLEDGING SETTLER RESPONSIBILITY: RECONCILIATION FOR CANADA'S COLONIAL PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE**

Alex Forsyth

*Transitional justice in the context of Canada's colonial past, present, and future has, as its goal, a reconciliation of Canadian settler society and state with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. After hundreds of years of colonization and mass human rights violations of Indigenous peoples, most recently seen in the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, it is not surprising that this goal is proving to be a difficult one to achieve. This paper argues that reconciliation is difficult in the Canadian context because settler society does not acknowledge their participation in and their responsibility to the harms done to the Indigenous peoples of Canada.*

*"Canada in the twenty-first century exists as a country enriched by immense human and natural resources. It is a nation filled with majestic beauty beyond compare, populated by talented individuals attracted from all corners of the globe in recent years and generations past in search of better lives for themselves and their families- all of this occurring with little regard to its illegitimate and immoral beginnings."*<sup>1</sup>

- Bradford Morse

*"The trouble with knowing was that it wouldn't end there. What did you do with what you knew? You could hide it away again, but you'd know that you'd done that. You couldn't ever go back to not-knowing."*<sup>2</sup>

- Kate Grenville, *Searching for the Secret River*

This paper will explore transitional justice in the Canadian context. Specifically it will focus on the past harms the Canadian state has inflicted on the Indigenous people of Canada, the present attempt to reconcile and acknowledge Canada's tainted history through restorative justice, and the future of Indigenous relations with the Canadian settler population and the Canadian state. I will argue that the reconciliatory challenge that Canada is facing is due in part to the difficulty the settler population has in acknowledging their responsibility and their participation in harms done to the Indigenous population. I will explore why acknowledgement is difficult to obtain

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<sup>1</sup> Bradford W. Morse, "Reconciliation Possible? Reparations Essential," ed. Mike DeGagne, Marlene Brant-Castellano and Linda Archibald (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), 235.

<sup>2</sup> Julia McGonegal, "The Great Canadian (and Australian) Secret: The Limits of Non-Indigenous Knowledge and Representation," *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 67.

from the Canadian settler society by looking at two important contributing factors, the first being the constant settler understanding of injustice to Indigenous peoples being located in the past not the present, and the second factor being that many Canadians that benefit from colonization do not hold direct responsibility to the Indigenous population.

### Transitional Justice in Canada

Transitional justice is concerned with how to rebuild societies in the period *after* human rights violations. Transitional justice focuses more specifically on reforms to the justice system, re-establishment of the rule of law and assisting the rebuilding of democracy. However, what if there is already a functioning legal system in place in a country like Canada and mass human rights violations have happened over hundreds of years of colonization? Canada is not recovering from recent mass atrocities or war, and yet the country suddenly finds itself in transition from a past and present colonial state to one that can uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and address the crimes against humanity that it has and is currently inflicting on its Indigenous population.

The present focus of this transitional process is fixed on the Indian Residential School system. The basic logic behind these schools was to assimilate the Indigenous peoples in Canada one child at a time and to eliminate their collective political power, which was a hindrance to Canadian nation building. Often children were forcibly removed from their parents and communities by RCMP officers and were neglected, beaten, sexually abused and many died of disease in these schools. Many Indigenous survivors of Indian Residential Schools still live with the trauma of their schooling, and the experience has contributed to the overwhelming presence of social pathologies, child abuse, domestic assault, suicide, alcoholism, and general social decay in Indigenous communities.

The framework of transitional justice that is being adopted in Canada has restorative and reparative dimensions. These two models are found in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was implemented on September 19, 2007. The reparative model compensates those who attended residential school through the common experience payments and more specific and severe abuses of physical, emotional, and sexual assault through the independent assessment process. As well, an official apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper was presented to residential school survivors in Parliament in 2008 as another form of reparation. A restorative justice model is also being implemented in Canada and takes the form of commemorative initiatives and The Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Llewellyn explains the mandate of the TRC:

The commission is tasked with establishing a full picture of the abuses of the residential school system and its legacy. The commission will provide an opportunity to more fully understand the nature, causes, and extent of the harms caused by the residential school system, including the context, factors, motives, and perspectives that led to and supported the system and the abuses that occurred within it. Through the commission processes, the truths about the residential school system can be told, made known, and understood.<sup>3</sup>

The commission's ability to focus on the larger issues that created residential schools is important because the Indigenous and Canadian state relationship has been strained and stained since first contact. The Indian residential schools, explains Snyder and Rice, is just the tip of the iceberg and an affect of a deeper racist ideology and even greater human rights violations inflicted by the state on Canadian Indigenous peoples.<sup>4</sup> These injustices include stealing

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Llewellyn, "Bridging the Gap Between Truth and Reconciliation: Restorative Justice and the Indian Residential Schools Truth & Reconciliation Commission," in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant-Castellano, Linda Archibald and Mike DeGagne, (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), 185.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Rice and Anna Snyder, "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada," in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy*

territories and resources, destroying the natural environment which Indigenous peoples have depended on for survival, destroying Indigenous women's status in their communities through the marrying out clause in the Indian Act, measuring blood quantum to assign identity through the Indian Act, and denying legal and political rights to Indigenous peoples unless they assimilated. Despite the long list of harms to the Indigenous population, the majority of Canadians know very little about this state relationship, and thus, their attitude towards their fellow Indigenous Canadians is impacted.

Through a reparative model, the larger picture of racism, colonization, and social suffering will be very hard to piece together from independent claims and there will be little deliberation on the reasons why Indian Residential Schools were created in the claimant and restitution process. There is a desperate need for restorative justice in Canada to reeducate the settler population and expose the truth of the Canadian state relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Keavy Martin states:

As a non-Aboriginal person, I do not have any family members who were victims of the residential school system ... Like me, many Canadians were never taught about federal Indian policy in high school, and as a result they are often unable to contextualize the social problems affecting Aboriginal peoples that they encounter in the media and on the street.<sup>5</sup>

The potential for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to link current social suffering of Indigenous peoples to state sponsored policy in a way that is comprehensible and convincing to settler society can go along way in terms of reducing racist ideology and the "why don't they just

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*of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant-Castellano, Linda Archibald and Mike DeGagne (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), 49.

<sup>5</sup> Keavy Martin, "Truth, Reconciliation, Amnesia: Porcupines and China Dolls and the Canadian Conscience," *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 48.

get over it?” mentality that feeds indifference to Indigenous grievances. As well, it can build a settler consciousness that questions the state’s perpetuation of harm against Indigenous peoples.

### The Importance of Focusing on Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment is a pivotal step in Canada’s transition from a colonizing state to a post-colonial state. Quinn explains that, “...a society must pass through several stages in its quest to right the wrongs of the past. The stages include memory and remembering, forgiveness, a general coming to terms with the past, and acknowledgement.”<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses on acknowledgement, though there are other important stages which Canada is experiencing and will need to experience in order to continue transitioning. Acknowledgment is a vital step to prevent wrongs from repeating themselves. Acknowledgment is defined by the Oxford Canadian English Dictionary as “the admission of something as true or as stated, and recognition of the authority of the claims of others.”<sup>7</sup> To apply this definition of acknowledgement to the Canadian context would mean admitting that colonization did and is taking place in Canada, and that this is an important and pressing issue for all Canadians because it is resulting in great harms and injustices to Indigenous peoples as seen in the legacy of Indian Residential Schools.

The goal of the TRC is to progress toward reconciliation. Govier describes reconciliation at its most basic level as, “...coming together again, in a restored relationship, after a rift resulting from actual or perceived wrongdoing on the part of one or both parties.”<sup>8</sup> From this definition, it is apparent that reconciliation is a very open-ended concept. According to Govier, damage to the relationship can be perceived and not real, and it is presumed that there was a positive

<sup>6</sup> Joanna R. Quinn, "Constraints: The Un-Doing of the Ugandan Truth Commission," *Human Rights Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (May 2004): 404.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Trudy Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 141.

relationship to return to. The continuous Canadian denial of colonialism and the long history of the exploitative relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples makes Govier's conception of reconciliation unsuitable for the Canadian context. John Paul Lederach provides a better understanding of reconciliation for Canadian transitional justice. He states that true reconciliation is not to forgive and forget, but to remember and change.<sup>9</sup> This understanding of reconciliation can place the task of reconciliation on the perpetrator and partly off of the shoulders of the victim in the Canadian context.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in his apology to the survivors of Indian Residential Schools, states that, "The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country."<sup>10</sup> Harper here seems to support the need to focus on the perpetrator group to remember and change, rather than for the victimized group to forgive and forget. Thus, Harper's apology follows Lederach's understanding of reconciliation. The apology creates a paradigm shift whereby Canadian reconciliatory action is no longer located in the past with forgetting, but continues in the future through a process of change. This understanding of reconciliation is important when addressing the negative legacy of Indian Residential Schools in the health of Indigenous communities and peoples today.

Without this process of acknowledgment and ownership of the responsibility to change, Canada cannot expect genuine forgiveness and reconciliation from Indigenous Canadians. Govier states, "...forgiveness can exist without reconciliation. When offenders express no remorse and do not acknowledge wrongdoing, victims can forgive unilaterally - but they will be wise to hold back if a restored relationship would leave them vulnerable to future exploitation."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rice and Snyder, "Reconcilliaiton in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada," 46.

<sup>10</sup> Courtney Jung, *Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Traditional Society*, University of Toronto (April 8, 2009): 17.

<sup>11</sup> Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 145.

Without settler acknowledgment of colonial history and current wrongs, Indigenous people make themselves vulnerable to further injustice if they forgive.

The correlation between acknowledgement and reconciliation has been outlined above, yet a vital question remains unanswered: how does settler society develop the desire to understand and stop the crimes against Indigenous people when the majority of Canadians do not suffer the consequences of colonization, and moreover, benefit from them? What is missing is a cognitive acknowledgement of wrongdoing. North explains that cognitive acknowledgement can allow emotional feeling of remorse and spark a commitment to reform.<sup>12</sup> Canadian settlers first need knowledge of the wrongdoings in order to engage in the emotional reaction that follows so often with the awareness of gross injustices. They need this knowledge to pursue a new relationship with Indigenous peoples that may be desired as a consequence of this emotional reaction to injustice.

### The Difficulty with Acknowledgement

Settlers, first, have difficulty acknowledging responsibility and participation in harms done to Indigenous people because the harms are framed in the context of the past. Courtney Jung says that Indigenous peoples view Stephen Harper's apology for residential schools as the beginning, where as the government and many Canadians saw it as "the closing of the Indigenous Chapter in Canada."<sup>13</sup> Irlbacher-Fox, an Indigenous self-government researcher in North West Territories, has had many discussions with member of Indigenous communities. These conversations reference ongoing injustices that have a timeline from the past into the future.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>13</sup> Jung, *Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Traditional Society*, 25.



When faced with dialogue surrounding past injustices one Indigenous man asks, “If it’s all in the past why does it hurt so much now?”<sup>14</sup> Irlbacher-Fox offers an answer to this question: “Injustice still hurts now because discrete past events are the basis of ongoing unjust systems, policies, and practices - and resulting suffering. This larger complex of unrestituted wrongs shapes the lives of people in the present.”<sup>15</sup>

A relevant and striking example of ongoing injustice and its dislocation from the past is state policy regarding Indigenous children. Jung explains that the “Canadian child welfare system is currently responsible for roughly 27,000 Aboriginal children who have been removed from their homes into protective custody. According to a report issued by the Assembly of First Nations, there are currently more than three times as many Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare agencies as there were in residential schools at the height of the system.”<sup>16</sup> Jung continues to outline the correlation between child welfare in Canada and Indian Residential schools,

Whereas one out of every 200 children in the general population is placed in the care of child welfare, one out of every ten aboriginal children are removed from their families because they suffer from neglect associated with substance abuse. Many of these substance abusing parents are residential school survivors.<sup>17</sup>

The connection between Residential School policy and current child welfare policy is alarming as they follow the same rationale; namely, that Indigenous peoples are not fit to raise what would be termed today as “healthy” children but what has been termed in the past as “civilized” children. When a five year old girl was removed by child welfare services in Regina,

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<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa: Self-Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2009): 30.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jung, *Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Traditional Society*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

a court hearing was held to have the child returned to her grandparents. One protestor in support of returning the child to her home community stated: “It’s been done in history...where they took the kids out of the home and put them in school. That caused a lot of problems with addictions and all the social ills because they couldn’t take care of their families. The government apologized for that. They said they were sorry and they compensated, and now it’s starting over again...”<sup>18</sup>

An article published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal details the types of social issues that are plaguing Indigenous communities:

Compared with the general Canadian population, specific Native populations have an increased risk of death from alcoholism, homicide, suicide and pneumonia. Of the Aboriginal population of Canada 15 years of age and older, 31 percent have been informed they have a chronic health problem...Social problems identified by aboriginal people in their community include substance abuse, suicide, unemployment and family violence.<sup>19</sup>

Two models can be used to analyze these findings. The first is the dysfunction theory which blames the victim for their current circumstances. Irlbacher-Fox explains how this model functions to place Indigenous peoples in a cycle of state violation followed by dependence on government programs. She says through the dysfunction model, Indigenous people are viewed as bringing the suffering, detailed in the above publication, upon themselves. In this model, the state takes the role of the benevolent savior providing social services for self-inflicted suffering.<sup>20</sup> This model presumes that suffering is caused by Indigenous refusal to adapt to a modern world, their insistence on “living in the past,” and their unhealthy life choices. The

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Irlbacher-Fox, *Finding Dahshaa: Self-Government, Social Suffering, and Aboriginal Policy in Canada*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30.

second model is the social suffering theory which blames structures, policies, and the historical legacy of colonialism for the current state of Indigenous communities.

To understand the present injustices through the social suffering model is vital to the acknowledgment process of settler society, for it locates the state as complicit in Indigenous community disintegration and also acknowledges that state harms are ongoing. Too often, misinformation and a lack of context in the media allow settlers to resort to the dysfunction theory in order to comprehend what they are reading. A federal bureaucrat who has worked in negotiating Indigenous self-government comments on how his perception of state harm to Indigenous peoples was affected by experiencing social suffering first hand. He states:

You can't understand what is being lost, what people are fighting for, until you see it for real. There is a real lack of understanding [by the public] of the human side. For example, when people say Aboriginal people are just there for handouts; then you go and see an elder in a community when it's minus forty degrees outside, with plastic bags on her feet because her slippers are worn out. Or when you represent the thing [government] that has devastated their culture and then they invite you in for tea.<sup>21</sup>

To fully understand Indigenous social suffering, it must be seen and contextualized. Often Indigenous people are passed over on urban streets or in their poor living conditions isolated in Northern communities and when they are noticed, direct connection to state policy and past state harms is not made. Thus, the settler society finds it hard to acknowledge its responsibility in addressing Indigenous harms that the dysfunction theory would describe as self-inflicted. As well, settlers have problems with acknowledgment because they cannot understand how they are, through democratic association to their elected leaders, complicit in current harmful Indigenous policies.

Furthermore, settler complicity with present state Indigenous policy is related to the fact that settlers find it hard to acknowledge their responsibility and participation in harms done to

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 21.

the Indigenous population because many hold only indirect responsibility to the wrongs. Many of the recent wrongs against Indigenous peoples were implemented by the state and not by individuals. The present state of Indigenous communities and peoples can be attributed to loss of land, culture, language, and health, which is the consequence of ongoing government assimilation or extinction policy seen in programs such as the Indian Residential Schools. Unlike mass atrocities, like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, during which many regular citizens physically took up machetes against their neighbors, it is difficult to realize the direct connection of the settler perpetrator group with the social suffering of Indigenous people. Many of the original settlers that initiated the stealing of lands have died, many of the Residential School staff who abused children are in their last days, and present child welfare officers are just doing their job when they remove yet another Indigenous child from his or her home community. This indirectness of responsibility has significant consequences for settler acknowledgement of wrongdoing.

Govier raises a pertinent point in regard to the issues of settler responsibility. She illustrates how settler Canadians can be both members of the perpetrator group of the colonizer by benefiting from Indigenous loss of lands and rights, and at the same time a member of a victim group. She explains,

A Jewish Canadian woman may be the descendant of Auschwitz survivors and through her Jewish identity have a strong sense of herself as a victim. She may also, individually be a victim or survivor of sexual assault. And yet at the same time, with regard to Canadian aboriginal issues, she is a white-Canadian woman, an economically secure person centered in mainstream Canadian society; in this role she has benefited from the exploitative acquisition of native lands, by successive Canadian governments. By omission- and perhaps even by her own political support for particular parties and policies- she shares responsibility, for Canadian government policy of aboriginal issues and has an affiliation with perpetrators.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 155.

Govier explains that people often possess a dualism of victim and perpetrator identities. She says, however, that people usually have no problem claiming their victim identity, but when it comes to their responsibilities as perpetrators they develop a sudden amnesia. Often personal wrongdoings are hard to come to terms with and contemplate because we do not wish to see ourselves in such a negative light. We see acknowledging our past wrongs as not just taking responsibility for our action or inaction, but as admitting negative and sometimes inhumane aspects of ourselves. Emma LaRocque gently but firmly attempts to awaken a sense of responsibility for injustices against Indigenous people in Canada. In her poem "My Hometown Northern Canada South Africa" she writes:

How did they get so rich?  
How did we get so poor?  
My Hometown Northern Canada South Africa  
How did you get so rich?

We were not always poor

How did they get our blueberry meadows  
our spruce and willow groves  
our sun clean streams  
and blue sky lakes?  
How did they get their mansions on the lake  
their cobbled circle drives  
with marble heads of lions on their iron gates?<sup>23</sup>

LaRocque's association between Canada and South Africa is powerful because Canada was heavily involved in sanctioning South Africa during Apartheid and most people recognize that Apartheid created severe injustices and economic inequalities between whites and blacks. What LaRocque is doing is equating Apartheid with colonialism in Canada. Her correlation also speaks to the responsibility of white South Africans in the Apartheid system. Alex Boraine says, "No

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<sup>23</sup> Emma LaRocque, "My Home Town Northern Canada South Africa," in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, ed. Joyce Green (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 216.

white in South Africa has clean hands”<sup>24</sup>, all are implicated in the system because they benefit from it. In the Canadian context, when faced with LaRocque’s direct questions - such as “How did our spruce and willow groves turn to ‘Mr’ Therien’s General Store?”<sup>25</sup> or “How did our blueberry meadows turn to pastures for ‘Mr’ Sykes’ cows?”<sup>26</sup> - it becomes very hard for settlers to plead ignorance in their participation in injustice against Indigenous peoples. As Govier states,

As individuals and as groups, we often know in some sense that we have committed wrongs - yet we choose to ignore what we know. We choose not to articulate what we know, not to admit it publicly, not to dwell on it, and certainly not to find out more about it...our choice to ignore leads eventually to culpable ignorance that grounds and supports our broader culpability.<sup>27</sup>

She continues with this important thought,

We ignore some phenomena, such as brutality or deprivation in our society; as a result of ignoring them, we know little about them. Then, if charged with responsibility or complicity, we claim we did not know. The excuse is a weak one because our lack of knowledge is due to our own willful and culpable ignorance.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, indirect responsibility for harms against Indigenous people, Govier would say, is really of the settler’s own creation.

Snyder and Rice remind us that “In the context of reconciliation, there are two essential types of acknowledgment: acknowledgement of wrongdoing and acknowledgement of the human beings that have been harmed.”<sup>29</sup> It might seem easier to only ask for the settlers to acknowledge that Indigenous people have been harmed and admit this is unfortunate, however, as described before, this risks assigning blame to Indigenous people through the dysfunction model and will do little to stop the harms from happening again. What is absolutely necessary is that settler

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<sup>24</sup> Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 121.

<sup>25</sup> Emma LaRocque, "My Home Town Northern Canada South Africa," 217.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Govier, *Forgiveness and Revenge*, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Rice and Snyder, "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada," 47.

society acknowledge their own wrongdoings in benefitting from colonization, and understand that the indirect relationship they have with Indigenous suffering is actually more direct than they think.

### Holding the Canadian State Accountable

It has been argued that settlers have difficulty acknowledging their direct responsibility and participation in harms done to the Indigenous peoples in Canada and this is the most pressing challenge to the reconciliatory process. Through an analysis of the obstacles of settler acknowledgement, it was discovered that, first, constant reference to Indigenous suffering taking place in the past supports the dysfunction theory that blames Indigenous peoples for the harms done to them by the state in the present. This inability to understand ongoing state harm obstructs acknowledgement of settler responsibility. It was suggested that the social suffering model be adopted in order for settler society to understand Indigenous social pathologies and link colonialism, state policy, and present harms, like the mass removal of Indigenous children from their home communities by child welfare services, to past injustices like Residential Schools. As well, through further analysis of obstacles to settler acknowledgement, it was determined in this paper that indirect settler responsibility for harms done to Indigenous peoples is caused by separating settler benefit of colonization from state policies of colonization. It was argued that benefitting from Indigenous harm does implicate settlers in colonization and it was shown that the indirectness of responsibility is not so much reality but a creation of settlers themselves.

The most striking example of how much Canada needs settler acknowledgement can be seen in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology in Parliament on 11 June 2008 to the children and the families of children who were subject to Indian Residential Schools. In his speech he

says, "There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential School system to ever prevail again."<sup>30</sup> This statement was accompanied only a year later on 25 September 2009 with a blatant denial of Canada's colonial history. While boasting to world leaders about Canada's sound economic situation, Harper stated at the G-20 conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, "We also have no history of colonialism."<sup>31</sup> Somehow Harper developed a sudden case of amnesia towards the people whose natural resources and land Canada has exploited to become such a well-respected economic leader.

It seems that there still is a place for the attitudes that inspired Residential Schools to prevail. Harper's statement should be deeply troubling to all Canadians. Snyder and Rice state, "Refusal to acknowledge wrongs is a display of political power and of impunity. Acknowledgement also serves to affirm the human worth and the dignity of the persons who were harmed."<sup>32</sup> When Stephen Harper denied Canada's colonial past he was not just misinterpreting a historical fact, he was making a political statement about Indigenous peoples in Canada - a statement that re-victimizes and denies the Indigenous population human dignity and worth as a people. Harper blatantly showed that his apology was empty of any real acknowledgement of the Canadian state's wrongful policies of colonialism and of the subsequent suffering of Indigenous people. To deny colonialism is to deny the reality of survivors of Residential Schools, a reality which Harper seemed to have wanted to share in through his apology and a reality which he had publicly promised not to recreate.

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<sup>30</sup> Jung, *Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Traditional Society*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Cornthassel Jeff, "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approached to Reconciliation," *English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 139.

<sup>32</sup> Rice and Snyder, "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada," 47.



If reconciliation is a *real* Canadian goal, one would expect Harper's statement to be publicly reprimanded, but he received little backlash for his remarks from the Canadian settler population. From its beginnings, the Canadian state has perpetuated colonization and injustice; it is not surprising that the state cannot be left to defend Indigenous interests in times of reconciliation. Jung states, "Context matters. Whether transitional justice measures will serve primarily to legitimate the status quo between post-colonial states, settler societies, and aboriginal peoples, or whether they will have transformational capacity, will depend in part on the political context in which they take place."<sup>33</sup> Without the political context of settler acknowledgement and subsequent political will to end the process of colonization, the reconciliation process will hold no weight and further crimes against Indigenous peoples will imminently follow.

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<sup>33</sup> Jung, *Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Traditional Society*, 25.

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